

## Contested Utopias: Language Ideologies in Valerii Votrin's *Logoped*

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### Introduction

Literary utopia can be understood as a way of posing a question, testing a theory or mirroring a trend. Through the creation of an artistic “what if”-scenario, the author of utopian fiction invites his or her readers to reflect critically on certain tendencies in contemporary society. As far as such tendencies are negative, represent social fears or political threats, we have to do with various kinds of dystopian fiction. It is perhaps not surprising that many dystopias foreground the role of language. As the main means of human communication language is obviously central to any utopian or dystopian society; but language's prominence as a main concern of dystopia is probably due to its close ties to power structures, ideologies and identities.

Totalitarian discourse, censorship, cultural policies, language legislation, norms and standards, but also linguistic resistance and revolt are among the topics that dystopian fiction can treat in playful, satirical, or philosophical ways.

The dystopian novel has become a highly popular genre in post-Soviet Russian prose, the real boom arriving with the turn of the twenty-first century.<sup>i</sup> A number of contemporary dystopian novels focus on language, among them Tat'iana Tolstaia's *Kys'* (*The Slynx*, 1999), Aleksandr Prokhanov's *Politolog* (*The Political Consultant*, 2005), Vladimir Sorokin's *Den' oprichnika* (*Day of the Oprichnik*, 2006), Maksim Kononenko's parody of Sorokin, *Den otlichnika* (*Day of the High Achiever*, 2008) and Viktor Pelevin's *S.N.U.F.F.* (2011).<sup>ii</sup> In this chapter, I will focus on Valerii Votrin's novel *Logoped* (*The Speech Therapist*, 2012), which portrays an imagined society where different language ideologies are juxtaposed. Whereas Votrin's novel is perhaps best characterised as a dystopian text, the different ‘visions’ of the ideal form and role of language in society may be seen as contested linguistic utopias that mirror – in a playful, satirical way – certain topics and trends in the post-Soviet Russian language debate. Before we embark upon the analysis of Votrin's novel, however, let us briefly review the major linguistic issues subject to contestation and debate in post-Soviet society.

## **The language debate in post-Soviet Russia**

Since the turn of the century, public debates on language in Russia have increasingly focused on the need to ‘protect’ the language. The background for this can be found in the processes of ‘vernacularisation’ that characterise late and post-Soviet sociolinguistic change,<sup>iii</sup> reflected ‘in the aspiration to allow previously “blocked” linguistic features, styles and genres to “pass the filter” into domains that have been the preserves of standardness [...].’<sup>iv</sup> With perestroika, glasnost and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union, shifting linguistic ideologies contributed to questioning the authority of the standard language. As a result, a strong tendency of norm relaxation could be observed – that is, the use and acceptance of non-standard linguistic elements such as swear words or slang – in official speech culture, in the mass media and other written genres, including literature, and, with the advent of new media technology, in digital genres.<sup>v</sup>

In the late 1980s, the shift in linguistic ideologies was closely linked to transformations in the political and social domains, which again had an impact on the nature of sociolinguistic change. Gorbachev’s politics of glasnost made it possible to discuss things formerly forbidden, to do so in language that had hitherto been considered unsuitable for the public sphere and to question the meaning of ideologically charged words. Boundaries between different spheres of speech, firmly consolidated by official regulation during the Soviet period, were seriously challenged, while the abolition of censorship in virtually all areas of official language usage led to a stylistic and lexical diversity unheard of before. In public speaking a transition took place from a linguistic culture dominated by prepared texts and adherence to strict norms overseen by state control to a culture open to spontaneous speech and verbal unpredictability. The new linguistic trends became even more apparent after the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1991, which also led to a massive influx of words from English, the language of globalisation, accompanied by a dissemination of ‘internal’ loans from various non-standard varieties of Russian, such as jargon, slang, or verbal profanity (*mat*).

Due to the ideologization of language culture in the Soviet era, language had not been discussed in public to the same extent as in the debates that arose in the late 1980s

and 1990s. Parallel to the developments that became central topics in the language debates – loan words, non-standard varieties, norms and regulations – the attitude towards language as something that could and ought to be discussed also changed. Moreover, in the time that has passed since the late perestroika years, the debates themselves have developed. During perestroika and the early post-Soviet years, the new linguistic situation was largely welcomed as reflecting society's recently won freedom, and was responded to with a general celebration of verbal diversity and spontaneous speech. Changes in the language culture were hailed as signs of 'democratisation' and 'liberalisation'. However, as the rigorous probing of the limits of acceptable language escalated, calls for the articulation of new norms, or the adherence to old ones, gradually became more vociferous. Towards the end of the 1990s, issues of language legislation and regulation began to dominate the discussions of language culture, with purist tendencies coming to the fore. At the same time, questions of language culture and language cultivation tended to be linked to broader issues of national identity, cultural legacy or ethical standards.<sup>vi</sup> The 2000s have seen a number of state-initiated language programmes and legislative proposals targeted at language regulation, the most recent of which have also entered the realms of literature and art.

The much-debated 'Law on the Russian Language' of 2005 is a key text in this regard, while recent prohibitive laws, such as the ban on profanity in art (2014), the fourth successive renewal for 2016–20 of the Federal targeted programme 'Russian language' and the emphasis on 'the role of the Russian language' in various governmental policy documents, indicate both that language cultivation is of concern to the authorities and that there is an ideological conviction that language *can* in fact be regulated through political initiatives.

Russian writers have long been accorded a special role in the context of the language question. The classics of Russian literature served as models in standard language education and maintenance, and there has been a tradition of collecting and publishing statements by professional writers on linguistic matters.<sup>vii</sup> In this chapter, I take an alternative look at the role of writers, and of fiction, in the language debates, examining not the writers' statements about language, but the ways in which linguistic attitudes and ideas are expressed in their literary work. The linguistic

condition of post-Soviet Russian society, I contend, provides a background, against which every literary ‘utterance’ – every text – may be read and interpreted.

Sociolinguistic change – linguistic change as well as changes in society’s life with language, including linguistic reflexivity – may have an impact on how language is represented, used or thematised in a given literary text, thus allowing us to read the literary work as a reflection of, or even contribution to, the language debate itself.<sup>viii</sup>

Questions concerning language legislation, linguistic ideologies and, more broadly, language and power, are, in fact, central to a number of recent Russian novels. Let us turn now to a close reading of Valerii Votrin’s *Logoped*, a novel where questions about linguistic policies and language legislation are intertwined with issues concerning identity and power structures in particularly interesting ways. Valerii Votrin (b. 1974) lives in Bath in the UK and has published, since his debut in 1995, a number of stories and three novels: *Zhalitvoslov* (*The Book of Prayers and Complaints*, 2007), *Poslednii magog* (*The Last Magog*, 2009) and *Logoped*.

### **The Speech Therapist**

*The Speech Therapist* portrays a dystopian society governed by strict orthoepic laws: a set of rules for pronunciation meant to preserve the standard language. The sanctioned standard language is constantly challenged by the vernacular spoken by most people, and labelled variously *rodnaia rech’* (vernacular), *razgovornaia rech’* (colloquial speech) or *narodnyi iazyk* (popular language).

As I will try to show, Votrin responds to the language question on at least two levels: first, he plays with central concepts in the public language debates, stretching their potential and experimenting with ‘extreme versions’ of notions such as *variants*, *norms* or *purity*. And, second, he treats the language issue on a philosophical level, questioning both the overt and hidden interrelationships between language and power, and language and identity.

The orthoepic laws of *The Speech Therapist* are supplemented by all the essential ingredients of a repressive society, in particular with regard to language use: there is censorship (*logopedicheskaia tsenzura*), state institutions linked to speech cultivation (*raionnaia logopedicheskaia kommissiia*, *Uprava*, *Glavnyi Logoped*,

*Sovet logopedov*), a whole army of speech therapists, speech-improving institutes and speech correctors (*recheispravitel'nye instituty, recheispraviteli*), and a speech therapy police (*logopedicheskaia militsiia* or *lomilitsiia*).

Within this world, we follow the fate of two protagonists. Speech therapist Iurii Petrovich Rozhnov is a liberal member of the speech therapy commission that tests the speech standards of people called to work for the party. If the candidates do not pass the examination, they are sent off to speech-improving institutes from where many, rather than improving their speech, return as *nemtyri* ('mutes'). Journalist Lev Pavlovich Zablukaev stems from a family of teachers, but has an ardent wish to become a speech therapist (a profession one is born into). He publishes fierce articles on speech culture and speech cultivation and takes a particular interest in unsuccessful 'candidates' (those tested by Rozhnov and his likes), investigating the stories of those who return from the speech-improving institutes as broken people. After a brief involvement with the *lingvari*, one of the two main oppositional groups in the country (each with their own linguistic ideology), he is arrested and exiled, but continues to write articles for the émigré press on the need for speech cultivation.

Meanwhile, there are stark tensions within the different factions of power in the society portrayed. There are the *lingvari* and the *tarabary* – both oppositional groups – but even the speech therapists are divided among themselves: there are liberals and conservatives. Liberal-minded speech therapists like Rozhnov eventually help to uncover the cruelties committed by the speech correctors, and begin to advocate the need for reforms. Just as with the perestroika programme of the late 1980s, the reforms, however, lead to the breakup of the state. The government is overthrown and a coalition of oppositional movements seizes power. Behind all this, there lurks a mysterious, frightening, and in the end, triumphant creature, reminiscent of the 'slynx' of Tat'iana Tolstaia's *Kys* (*The Slynx*, 2000). Votrin's creature is no 'slynx', however, its name is *Iazyk* – Language or Tongue.<sup>ix</sup>

I will structure my analysis of the novel along the lines of three readings: (1) 'a mirror of the language debates', (2) 'the Language's point of view' and (3), 'Votrin's poetics of destabilisation'.<sup>x</sup>

### *A mirror of the language debates*

Linguistic ideologies, speech cultivation and the role of the state in such matters define the main focus of Votrin's novel. In addition to highlighting the topic of language legislation and control, the book also plays with central concepts that we can recognise from the public debate on language in post-Soviet Russian society, from the conservatives' focus on preservation (*sokhranenie*) and purity (*chistota*) of language, or the 'discourse of threat', in Lara Ryazanova-Clarke's words,<sup>xi</sup> warnings of damage and contamination (*porcha, zasorenie iazyka*), to the more liberal-minded language mavens speaking of the natural and necessary development (*razvitie*) and the liberalisation of language (*liberalizatsia/svoboda iazyka*).

For example, every session of the speech therapy commission begins with the solemn declaration of the speech therapist's oath: 'I, [...] promise to observe the purity of language and follow the sacred norms in an exemplary way...' (12).<sup>xii</sup> The conception of 'sacred norms' is the institutionalised one, nurtured already in the schools for speech therapy students, where they sing hymns to the various sounds and their corresponding orthoepic norms. In fact, their attitude to the norms is what distinguishes the ruling elite from the people: 'The speech therapists became guardians of the norms from the very moment when people stopped paying attention to the norms. The salvation of language now depends on us [i.e. the speech therapists], only on us. For the people are not with us. The people are against us!'(63).

The different viewpoints regarding the status of linguistic norms are illustrated by the narrative perspective: the chapters that tell of Rozhnov, the reform-friendly speech therapist, are entitled in such a way that reflects the vernacular, or popular speech, with spellings such as *Glava pelvaia* ('first chapter') instead of *pervaia, tlet'ia* ('third') instead of *tret'ia* and *shed'maia* ('seventh') instead of *sed'maia*; chapters that tell of Zablukaev, the conservative guardian of the standard language, are labelled *vtoraia, chetvertaia, piataia* ('second', 'fourth', 'fifth'), in full accordance with standard norms.

The chapter headings will have given the reader an idea about the characteristics of the popular speech, but let us look at them now in more detail. The novel starts out by describing two major 'errors', the pronunciation of [r] as [l] – as in *poliadok* (for

*poriadok* ‘order’) and the inability to pronounce fricatives and affricates like [sh], [zh], [ch] or [shch] (pronounced like [s], [z] or [f]). After a while, we are introduced to new types of error: [d] for [r] and [v] for [r]. Towards the end, the various errors are compounded, occurring more and more frequently in conjunction with one another. Here are the triumphant words of Parin, a representative of one of the new parties in power, to Rozhnov:

‘– That’s it! We *tear the cover of the false language* off our names, *things* and words! *Now* people and *things* are called by their real names!

– But what about the norms? – Rozhnov protested faintly, but Parin responded, furiously spitting saliva: *There are no old false rotten norms* any more! The freedom of language is the freedom of the *people*! Where have you been *lately*, *comrade?!*’ (215)<sup>xiii</sup>

Rozhnov is shocked by the style of speech of the new authorities. And ‘the new language’ is not just a problem for Rozhnov, it turns out. People speak with so many deviations from the standard norms that they no longer understand each other. The language question has become a political problem and Rozhnov is invited to the ministry to discuss the matter during a special session ‘on language’. Rozhnov gives his advice, but it becomes clear to him when speaking that his speech – standard Russian in accordance with the norms – is no longer comprehensible to the people around him. He acts out, in a way, the repeatedly voiced concern of many language mavens of the late 1990s and early 2000s, that the dominant tendencies in contemporary Russian language culture – the huge influx of foreign loanwords and the spread of non-standard varieties – would lead, in the end, to a situation where people would no longer understand each other.

We see how Votrin challenges central concepts in the language debates, stretching their potential and experimenting playfully with ‘extreme versions’ of notions such as *variants*, *norms* or *purity*. So far, however, we have dealt with such concepts mainly from the point of view of language legislators, language mavens and ordinary language users. What is truly original in the novel is the role played by language itself.

*The point of view of Language*

There is a third main protagonist in Votrin's *The Speech Therapist*, a mysterious creature by the name of *Iazyk* which becomes intertwined with the lives of both Rozhnov and Zablukaev. While the portrayal of the society, its people, groups and factions is from the point of view of humans and (human) linguistic ideologies, the introduction of *Iazyk* introduces the point of view of Language itself. The 'liberalisation of language' – a catchphrase, we recall, of the language debates of the 1990s – is interpreted quite literally as the liberation of a frightening creature that lurks around outside windows in the dark and acquires ever more grotesque features. For *Iazyk*, norms are just a disturbing hindrance to the free flow of language, or the Rule of Language.

*Iazyk* makes its first appearance early in the novel as a friendly creature in Rozhnov's dream. It appears in the form of letters that surround and caress Rozhnov like kittens. Rozhnov offers it milk and feels safe and protected. He likes to think that *Iazyk* knows about his efforts to expose the wrongdoings of the speech correctors and that he paves the way for it, sets it free: 'Turii Petrovich was certain that the wrath of Language wouldn't touch him.' (8). It takes a while before Rozhnov understands that he needs to surrender totally to Language, in order not to disturb it. More often than not, moreover, the 'gaze of Language' is not approving, but threatening. There is much talk about the 'wrath of language', as in the stories that Zablukaev gathers about the unsuccessful party candidates. It is Iubin, Zablukaev's main informant, that explains the true goal of Language to Zablukaev:

- It's language, Leva, Language! You don't speak it yourself, do you?
- Why shouldn't I? Of course I do!
- Oh no, you speak according to the books. And it doesn't like that. It likes it when everyone speaks it.' (43)

*Iazyk* is here identified with the popular language spoken by the people.

From Zablukaev's perspective, the popular language is a result of corruption. His choice of terms reflects his view of the state of the language, which he paraphrases as *l'zheiazkyk* ('false language'), *durnoe porozhdenie negramotnogo plebsa* ('bad creation of the illiterate plebs') and *psevdoiazkyk* ('pseudolanguage'). The image of



*Iazyk* becomes, for him, a frightening creature which acquires, towards the end of the novel, truly grotesque dimensions:

There it was, Language. It was impossible to describe. It was all swirling, glimmering and changing its shape. [...] It ruled. It bowed his shapeless head over the country, watched, listened, subdued. Below it scurried tiny little people, but they were almost impossible to see. It itself was them. And it couldn't speak. Yes, Zablukaev immediately realised that Language was mute. (205)

While Zablukaev is able to withstand the evil gaze of *Iazyk*, he is, paradoxically, convinced that were he to die, it would be by 'a word from the old books':

For some incomprehensible reason he knew that he could be killed only by a word – a sharp, honed one. And it would not be one from the popular language – this pseudolanguage was far too fluid, – no, this word would need to be taken from the old books. Yes, only there would it be possible to find a word, piercing as a dart, a word with a terrifying destructive power, a hammerhead word, a chisel word, a bludgeon word. (161–2)

Zablukaev gives up his dream of becoming a speech therapist and decides to return to 'post-revolutionary' Russia and become a teacher. When he returns, he is in fact killed as soon as he steps out of the train. We learn of this when Rozhnov and his wife, a day later, are expelled from the country as 'enemies of the language'. As they arrive at the train station, Rozhnov's glance is caught by the new signboards, featuring spellings such as *Bivetnye kashshy* ('Ticket counter') instead of *Biletnye kassy*, *Lestolan* ('Restoran') instead of *Restoran*, *Gavety i vulnaly* ('Newspapers and journals') instead of *Gazety i zhurnaly*:

And then Rozhnov freezes on the spot. What a delusion! From the corner of his eye he notices that in between other neon signboards there are some glowing letters, that should not, that cannot be there. Among the miserable mutilated words, shines one word – an untouched, genuine, all-powerful word from the old books, and a terrifying meaning pours out of it. (241)

They learn from the guard that the day before, another fellow who had stared at the same signboards, had fallen down dead as if shot. It was Zablukaev, hit by the all-powerful word. 'A *kind of teacher* he was...' (*Uchiteliska kakoi-to*), says the guard. Rozhnov replies: 'Not a teacher [...]. A speech therapist. A true speech therapist.' (241).

Rozhnov and Zablukaev never meet, although their paths cross when the material about the fate of the 'mutes' gathered by Zablukaev and confiscated by the secret police, comes to light as Rozhnov prepares his final blow against the speech correctors, a process that gets out of control and leads to great turmoil and the eventual overthrow of the authorities. In this way, Zablukaev, just like Rozhnov, contributes unwillingly to the upheaval; one ends up dead, the other is expelled from the country. The triumphant one is *Iazyk*. Once the train has left and the platform is deserted, it starts to move as 'a huge, horned shadow': 'Slowly, as if stretching, it stands up and looks behind the departed train, and then, when its lights are hidden from sight, it rises in satisfaction and dissolves over the city.' (242).

The fates of both Rozhnov and Zablukaev may leave the reader puzzled. While Rozhnov is initially in favour of reforms, once the process takes off, it is clear that 'perestroika' leads to disintegration, that is, the process has gone way too far. When he returns to the ministry, warning against linguistic anarchy and propagating the need for norms after all, it is equally clear that, as a hero of yesterday, he comes too late. But why is Zablukaev killed by a word 'from the old books', associated with the correct, or standard language? In Zablukaev's own explanation, only such a word is powerful enough to kill, an idea that plays in a bizarre manner on the traditional logocentricity of Russian culture. The irony of his death is also, however, part of a pattern of destabilisation at work in the novel, that renders all concepts, positions and ideologies ambiguous.

### *Votrin's poetics of destabilisation*

Votrin's treatment of the language question in *The Speech Therapist* destabilises a number of terms, conceptions and ideological notions. From early on we sense a blurring of borderlines between 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in questions of language cultivation. The speech therapist Rozhnov, whose task it is to maintain the standard

language, is *very* liberal in his language attitudes and understanding of norms: '[L]anguage must evolve without any control. If the people speak this way, it has to be like this.' (8–9). 'It is you who makes the word correct – your pronunciation.' (15).

The linguistic varieties themselves are also destabilised, or change connotations: As a result of Zablukaev's rhetorical persuasion in his articles promoting the 'correct language', speaking in this manner becomes a fashion among young people in the émigré society, which is dominated by the *tarabary*, that is, speakers of the popular language. 'Order' – *poriadok* – is a catchword throughout the novel, but is mostly spelled and pronounced *poliadok* (apart from by Rozhnov's parrot, who pronounces it in a grotesquely hypercorrect version: '– Orrrrder! Orrrder! – Lomual'd cried out joyfully.' (6).<sup>xiv</sup> Its opposite, *proizvol* – 'lawlessness' – appears in the correct spelling.

Also, we should not forget that, to the reader, the 'correct' speech is the unmarked standard Russian, while for most of the inhabitants of this country, it is not. In the eyes of the reader, the 'natural', popular speech (*narodnaia rech'*), comes through as not only flawed and imperfect, but rather infantile, as is evident from publication titles such as *Olfoglafiia: inoi vzgliad na problemu* (instead of *Orfografiia...*) or party names like *Istinno-Nadodnoe Delo* (instead of *Narodnoe*).

On the ideological level, the linguistic conservatives are depicted initially as repressive and totalitarian in their outlook, whereas later, when the proponents of reform and popular language come to power, they turn out to be just as brutal and unscrupulous as their predecessors.

Rozhnov warns the new authorities: 'We are on the verge of language's demise, comrades.' (231). A moment later, however, he starts speaking with numerous errors, until his speech turns into completely incomprehensible gibberish:

– *Comrade Kovopen'kin*,<sup>xv</sup> – Rozhnov hammered on to him while listening to his own voice with disgust, – *I don't argue against the significance of your address. But you must understand that the main thing now is the language. You need to understand that the country cannot develop independently of the language. We have to fight for its purity.*

‘God, what I am saying!’ he thought in horror. ‘What’s happening to me?’ (237)<sup>xvi</sup>

He wants to convince the authorities of the need for linguistic control, but loses control over his own speech: he becomes a *nemtyr*’ himself.

He opened his mouth in order to warn Konopel’kin, to distract him, to let him know urgently about the need to introduce linguistic control, but incoherent grunting rushed out of his mouth. Rozhnov’s tongue did not obey him. He tried to pronounce words, but his tongue did not obey him.

– Ugh! Ugh! – Rozhnov roared horror-stricken.

He understood that retribution had befallen him. His language had left him.

Muteness had struck him in retribution. It seemed as if he had suffered a stroke.

From wild terror Rozhnov ‘ugh-ed’ even louder. He called for Iroshnikov,<sup>xvii</sup> whose customary voice of reason and calm were as necessary to him as air:

– Khafa! Saza! Bafa! Tasa!’ (237)<sup>xviii</sup>

We see in these examples how the protagonists move in and out of linguistic ideologies and practices, and in and out of different relationships to the personification of Language, before the title of the novel, finally, shifts its reference from Rozhnov to Zablukaev, who is designated by Rozhnov to be ‘the true speech therapist’, having just been killed by ‘the evil word’ of the language he believed in.

### **Language and identity: concluding remarks**

On the surface, *The Speech Therapist* is quite explicit and straightforward in its treatment of central ideas and concepts of the language debates in general, and language policy in particular. As we have seen, however, there is a certain irony at work in the book, expressed by means of a poetics of ambiguity and destabilisation, which makes the novel stand out as a sophisticated discussion of current conceptions of *norms*, *language* and *linguistic ideologies*.

It is easy to read Votrin’s *The Speech Therapist* as a political allegory of the perestroika years and subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union. After the ‘revolution’, there is a need to handle the past, a classic question in post-totalitarian societies: ‘The most dangerous thing is to keep the history secret, to silence its honest voice.’ (145).

The focus on language and the context of contested linguistic utopias, meanwhile, allow Votrin to pose a number of more specific questions related to the post-totalitarian condition. The close connection between language and power is emphasised in the very structure of the quasi-totalitarian state, where language legislation is seen as the foundation of the state, and later in the break-up and democratisation of both state and language.

The representation of Language as an acting figure in its own right may be interpreted on several levels. It acts out the 'liberalisation of language' mantra in a grotesque manner (reminiscent of Vladimir Sorokin's radical materialisation of metaphors<sup>xix</sup>), but it is also a playful response to the typical assurances expressed in the language debates by linguists and other language professionals (even writers), that the language is strong enough to take care of itself.<sup>xx</sup> Furthermore, it turns the institutional view on norms and language legislation on its head, by introducing the radical perspective of language itself on these matters: norms are just a hindrance to the free flow of language. By implication, it also questions the legitimacy of the ruling power with reference to the significant role played by linguistic regulation in society.

The topic of language and power is further highlighted through the issue of language ideologies. From the outset, linguistic ideologies are represented as being related to groups, rather than to individuals. The topic of variation, for example, is treated in relation to various groups or factions, or to types of people, who react differently; popular speech is spoken by the abstract notion of *narod* ('the people'), and so on. Most vividly, the tension between individuals and ideologies comes to the fore in Zablukaev's stories about the 'mutes'. Since the manuscript was confiscated by the authorities before Zablukaev emigrated, he must evoke the individual stories from memory when he intends to use them in his writings about speech cultivation for the émigré press. It turns out that he can remember only the facts, and not the individuals and their particular speech habits:

He was able to recall a large number of the stories from the lost collection about the mutes. He published a few of them, the most important ones in his view, but added that these publications based on memory lacked the main thing: the language. Zablukaev's tenacious memory had retained the facts, retained the

outline and the story, but the language... – Zablukaev couldn't remember the speech characteristics of the storytellers, and therefore all the stories lost individuality. (162–3)

A similar flash of insight occurs into the complex relationship between language, power and identity in Rozhnov's personal dealings with the language. At the beginning of the novel, he has a habit of thinking in popular language and speaking in correct language: he adheres to the rules set by the authorities and is himself part of the monitoring and control system. Later, he makes a conscious decision to speak (his moderated version of) the popular language, before, again, he switches back to the correct language towards the end of the novel. The pivotal moment is the scene in the ministry, where he discovers his name on a paper spelled as Iulii Lozhnov.

–Excuse me, – began Rozhnov and returned to the table.

– *What* is it?

– Here there's written 'Lozhnov'. That's an error of some kind, my surname is Rozhnov.

An unpleasant smile appeared on the face of Parin.

– *No error at all*. You had that name *earlier, under the old regime*. This is how you're called *under* the new one. *Now* that's *your real* surname. (214–15)<sup>xxi</sup>

Struck by this attack on his own identity, he decides to abandon popular speech, as becomes apparent in a dialogue with his wife: – *What* is it, *Iulochka*? – she moved back. – *But you talked* that way yourself! – I'm not *Iulochka*! – Rozhnov continued to roar. – Enough of this rubbish in my house! From now on – only the pure, correct language! (216).<sup>xxii</sup>

In the end, Rozhnov gives up popular speech because of the problematic link between language and power. Formerly a firm believer in the linguistic utopia of popular speech, he realises that he cannot speak the language of those now in power, who are burning books, persecuting people who speak the correct language, and changing the names of people in order to conform to the new norms. Whereas to Rozhnov, the question of language and language cultivation was initially a pragmatic question of complying with the speech practices of the majority, it now becomes a personal

decision linked to identity and moral convictions, rather than to abstract notions of power and ideology.

*The Speech Therapist* may be read as an artistic interpretation of one of the catch phrases in the language debates of the 1990s, the ‘democratisation of language’. In Votrin’s dystopian world, a philosophical perspective goes hand in hand with grotesque devices, questioning the legitimacy of power structures that get involved in linguistic regulation.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> See Mattias Ågren, *Phantoms of a Future Past: A Study of Contemporary Russian Anti-Utopian Novels* (Stockholm Studies in Russian Literature 43) (Stockholm 2014), p. 3; Eliot Borenstein, 'Dystopias and catastrophe tales after Chernobyl', in Evgeny Dobrenko and Mark Lipovetsky (eds), *Russian Literature Since 1991* (Cambridge 2015), pp. 86–103.



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<sup>ii</sup> For a discussion of the role of language in Kononenko, Prokhanov and a couple of other of recent Russian conservative dystopias, see Per-Arne Bodin, 'The Russian language in contemporary conservative dystopias', *The Russian Review*/75 (4) (2016), pp. 579–88. For an analysis of Tolstaia's novel, see Ingunn Lunde, *Language on Display: Writers, Fiction and Linguistic Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Edinburgh 2018), pp. 137–66. The theme of language in utopian/dystopian literature is, of course, not confined to Russian works. For studies of the role of language in non-Russian utopias and related genres, see, for example, Walter E. Meyers, *Aliens and Linguists: Language Study and Science Fiction* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press 1980), David W. Sisk, *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (Westport: Greenwood 1997), Dunja M. Mohr, "'The tower of babble': The role and function of fictive languages in utopian and dystopian fiction', in Ralph Pordzik (ed.), *Futurescapes: Space in Utopian and Science Fiction Discourses* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2009), pp. 225–48.

<sup>iii</sup> The concept of 'sociolinguistic change' seeks to bring together the study of linguistic and social change, seeing these as 'mutually constitutive processes'. This implies the study of changes in language and in society, but also the study of changes in the relationship between language and society. See Jannis Androutsopoulos, 'Mediatization and sociolinguistic change: Key concepts, research traditions, open issues', in Jannis Androutsopoulos (ed.), *Mediatization and Sociolinguistic Change* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2014), p. 5.

<sup>iv</sup> Nikolas Coupland, 'Sociolinguistic change, vernacularization and broadcast British media', in Jannis Androutsopoulos (ed.), *Mediatization and Sociolinguistic Change* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2014), p. 87.

<sup>v</sup> Post-Soviet language culture and (sociol)linguistic change have been studied quite extensively over the last couple of decades. See, among others, Larissa Ryazanova-Clarke and Terence Wade (eds), *The Russian Language Today* (London/New York: Routledge 1999), Leonid Krysin (ed.), *Russkii iazyk segodnia*, vols 1–5 (Moscow: Azbukovnik 2000–12), Ingunn Lunde and Tine Roesen (eds), *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Slavica Bergensia 6), (Bergen: Dept of Foreign Languages 2006), Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen (eds), *From Poets to Padonki: Linguistic Authority and Norm Negotiation in Modern Russian Culture* (Slavica Bergensia 9) (Bergen: Dept of Foreign Languages 2009), Michael S. Gorham, *After Newspeak: Language Culture and Politics in Russia from Gorbachev to Putin* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press 2014).

<sup>vi</sup> See, e.g., Gorham, *After Newspeak*, pp. 98–132; Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, "'The crystallization of structures": Linguistic culture in Putin's Russia', in Ingunn Lunde and Tine Roesen (eds), *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Bergen: Dept of Foreign Languages 2006), pp. 31–63.

<sup>vii</sup> A tradition that has continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, see Ingunn Lunde, 'Pisateli o iazyke: Contemporary Russian writers on the language question', *Russian Language Journal*/58 (2008), pp. 3–18.

<sup>viii</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the role of writers, and of fiction, in post-Soviet language culture, see my *Language on Display: Writers, Fiction and Linguistic Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Edinburgh 2018).

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<sup>ix</sup> *Iazyk* can mean both 'language' and 'tongue' as organ of speech. This double meaning is relevant for the novel's focus on spoken language; also, it clearly comes into play in some of the descriptions of the physical forms and movements of this creature, especially towards the end of the novel. In the quoted passages that follow, I have chosen 'Language' as the main translation of *Iazyk* but invite the reader to keep the broader meaning of the Russian word in mind.

<sup>x</sup> The following analysis is a revised and abridged version of my section on Valerii Votrin in *Language on Display*, pp. 167–78, 186–88.

<sup>xi</sup> Ryazanova-Clarke, 'The crystallization' p. 34.

<sup>xii</sup> Quotations are taken from Valerii Votrin, *Logoped* (Moscow 2012), with page references in parentheses. Translations are my own.

<sup>xiii</sup> Words in the 'popular language', i.e. deviating from the norm, are marked by italics. I give the original in endnotes in this and further quotations where linguistic features are essential. – Вот! Мы слышаем покловы лзивого языка с насих имен, весей и слов! Тепель люди и веси называются своими истинными именами!//– Но, позвольте, а нормы? – слабо возразить [sic] Рожнов, но Парин в ответ, плюясь бешеной слюной, закричал://– Нет больсе никаких стальных лзивых плогнивсих нолм! Свобода языка – свобода налода! Где вы были в последнее влемя, товались?!

<sup>xiv</sup> – Порррядок! Порррядок! – радостно вопит Ломуальд.

<sup>xv</sup> Konopel'kin (the correct form) is one of the presenters in the session 'on language'.

<sup>xvi</sup> – Товались Ковопенькин, – втолковывал ему Рожнов, с ужасом слыша свой голос, – я ве ошполяю вазнофть басего доквата. До вы доздны бонядь, фто сейфяз гвадое – явык. Пойбите, фто ствада де мовет вазвиваться вде явыка. Мы доздны бовоться ва его фястоту.//«Боже, что я говорю! – в ужасе думал он. – Что со мной?»

<sup>xvii</sup> Sasha Iroshnikov is Rozhnov's friend from the lyceum days.

<sup>xviii</sup> Он раскрыл рот, чтобы предупредить Конопелькина, отвлечь его, срочно поведать о необходимости ввести языковой контроль, но из его рта вырвалось бессвязное мычание. Язык не слушался Рожнова. Он пытался выговорить слова, но язык его не слушался.//– Ы! Ы! – в ужасе мычал Рожнов.//Он понял, что его постигла кара. Язык его оставил. В наказание его поразила немота. Кажется, с ним случился удар. От дикого страха Рожнов замычал еще сильнее. Он звал Ирошникова, всегдашние рассудочность, спокойствие того были нужны ему как воздух://– Хафа! Саза! Бафа! Таца! A moment later, Rozhnov is woken up at home by his wife, who ask if he has had a bad dream; it remains unclear were the 'session on language' becomes a 'real nightmare'.

<sup>xix</sup> Cf. Dirk Uffelman, 'Led tronulsia: the overlapping periods in Vladimir Sorokin's work from the materialization of metaphors to fantastic substantialism', in Ingunn Lunde and Tine Roesen (eds), *Landslide of the Norm: Language Culture in Post-Soviet Russia* (Bergen 2006), pp. 82–107.

<sup>xx</sup> See Lunde, 'Pisateli o iazyke', pp. 9–11.

<sup>xxi</sup> – Простите, – начал Рожнов, возвращаясь к столу.//– Сто такое?//– Вот здесь написано: «Ложнов». Это какая-то ошибка, моя фамилия Рожнов.

На лице Парина появилась неприятная улыбка.//– Никакой осибки нет. Это ланьсе вы так назывались, пли сталом лезиме. А так будете называться пли новом. Это тепель васа настояся фамилия.

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<sup>xxii</sup> – Ты сто, Юлочка? – попятилась она. – Ты же сам так говолил!// – Я не Юлочка! – продолжал  
бушевать Рожнов. – Все, с этой дрянью у меня в доме покончено! Отныне – только чистый  
правильный язык!